



Bringing
Focus
to the
Issues

Research Atlanta, Inc.

Georgia State University

Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

What is Social Capital and Why Does It Matter?



Bringing
Focus
to the
Issues

Research Atlanta, Inc.

Georgia State University

Andrew Young School of Policy Studies

What is Social Capital And Why Does It Matter?

By
Dr. John C. Thomas

In July 1992, the Georgia State University Policy Research Center agreed to assist Research Atlanta in selecting and preparing its reports. The Board of Directors of Research Atlanta sets the research agenda while the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies facilitates the research and prepares the reports. The reports are reviewed and approved by Research Atlanta before their release. The objective is to produce concise, well-documented reports analyzing local public policy problems and issues and advancing practical, cost-effective options for addressing them.

RESEARCH ATLANTA, INC.

Research Atlanta, Inc. is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit organization that studies problems affecting metropolitan Atlanta. The goals of the organization are:

- \$ To develop and present reliable information about community issues to Atlanta area leaders in a manner that encourages informed policy planning and implementation.
- \$ To present information on community issues to the general public so that it can better understand and participate in decisions affecting the community.

Research has been conducted in such areas as public education, taxation, government structure, private philanthropy, housing, delivery of government services, and transportation.

THE ANDREW YOUNG SCHOOL OF POLICY STUDIES

The Andrew Young School of Policy Studies was established at Georgia State University in 1996 in an effort to train tomorrow's leaders in the public, non-profit, and private sectors, as well as provide practical research and solutions to many of the important policy problems facing local, state, and national governments. In addition to graduate and undergraduate degrees in economics, urban policy studies, public policy, and public administration, research programs focus on the following policy issues:

Regional Economics; State and Local Government Finance; Environmental Policy; Economics of Developing and Transition Countries; Human Resource Development; Education Policy; Health Policy; Urban Structure; Planning, and Poverty; Innovation, Science and Entrepreneurship; Transportation Policy and Management; and Public Management.

ÓMarch 2001 Research Atlanta, Inc.

Research Atlanta, Inc. Board of Directors

Raymond B. King
President

John Ahmann

Patrick Hennessey
Vice President – Project Selection

Kathy Ashe

Sally S. Bethea

Andrew Feiler
Vice President – Strategic Planning

Shirley Clark Franklin

Doug R. Hooker
Vice President – Community Outreach

Angela Gittens

Margaret Joslin

Paul Kelman
Vice President – Marketing

Audrey Forbes Manley

David Paterson

Jim Wilson
Treasurer

Helen Preston Tapp

T. Michael Tennant

Charles H. Tisdale.
Secretary

STAFF

Deborah O. McCarty
Executive Director

Janice Ransby
Executive Assistant

Board of Advisors

John F. Allgood
J. Veronica Biggins
Cecil D. Conlee
Bradley Currey, Jr.
Ann Q. Curry
Ann W. Cramer
Larry L. Gellerstedt, III

William L. Gibbs
Milton H. Jones, Jr.
Ingrid Saunders Jones
D. Raymond Riddle
Horace H. Sibley
Lyndon A. Wade
Sam A. Williams

Funding for Research Atlanta, Inc.
is provided mainly by contributions
from businesses, foundations and individuals.
Donations are tax-deductible.

For additional information
about Research Atlanta, Inc.
or to obtain a copy of any report, contact:
Research Atlanta, Inc.
Andrew Young School of Policy Studies
Georgia State University
University Plaza
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
Phone: 404-651-1385
FAX: 404-651-1906
Internet: www.researchatlanta.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following individuals for their generous and valuable comments:

David Sjoquist – Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, Georgia State University

Alicia Phillip – The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

Andrea Berry – The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

Winsome Hawkins – The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

The Staff of The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta

Deborah McCarty – Research Atlanta

Raymond King – Sun Trust Bank

The Board of Research Atlanta, Inc.

Sam Engle – Georgia Public Broadcasting

Sally Fowler, Department of Public Administration & Urban Studies, Georgia State University

Robert Putnam, Harvard University

The Staff of the Saguaro Seminar, Harvard University

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John Clayton Thomas is Professor and Chair of the Department of Public Administration and Urban Studies in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. He has written three books and more than forty articles, principally in the areas of urban affairs and public management. Thomas is especially interested in how to improve the connections between citizens and their governments, a topic closely related to issues of social capital. He holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Northwestern University along with Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Journalism and Mass Communication from the University of Minnesota.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	1
About the Author	2
Contents	3
Executive Summary	4
Why Is Social Capital and Why Does It Matter?	6
The Social Capital Benchmark	6
Levels of Social Capital in the Atlanta Area	7
Trust and Distrust in Atlanta	7
A Deficit in Civic and Political Involvement?	8
A Religiously-Involved Community.....	9
A Diversity of Friendships	10
A Computer-Friendly Community.....	10
Healthier and Happier?	11
Looking Inside the Atlanta Community	11
The Difficult Problem of Race and Trust.....	11
Analyzing Atlanta's Civic Participation.....	12
The Central Place of Faith-based Engagement in Atlanta	13
Diversity of Friendships	14
Conclusions and Implications	14
The Meaning of the Atlanta Findings	14
Figures	17-24
Appendices	
I	25
II	26
III.....	28-33

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sparked by the work of Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, a team of researchers at Harvard University recently conducted a national survey on “social capital,” that is, social resources for building healthy societies. With the support of 36 community foundations and four private foundations, the survey included separate surveys of various communities around the country, including a random sample of 510 residents of the Atlanta area under the sponsorship of the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta. Research Atlanta analyzed the data.

The Meaning of Social Capital. Social capital refers to “community connectedness,” with components of (1) social networks, the extent to which people are involved with other people in social networks, and (2) feelings about reciprocity and trust, feelings that can grow from involvement in social networks. Extensive research in recent years suggests that more social capital promotes higher educational achievement, more effective governments, faster economic growth, and less crime and violence.

Where Does Atlanta Stand? As compared to hypothetical similar communities, Atlanta residents appear to have less of several kinds of social capital. First, on a composite measure of social trust based on questions about trust of various people (e.g., neighbors, store owners, police), Atlanta-area residents appear to be less trusting—ten percentage points below residents of comparable communities. Inter-racial trust, or trust of other racial groups, is also lower for the Atlanta sample, but less so than for social trust. Atlanta residents are less involved in civic and political affairs—from attending political rallies to reading newspapers. As the other side of the coin, Atlanta residents rate as higher on faith-based engagement, including various involvements with places of worship, and on diversity of friendships. Atlantans are also more advanced in their computer usage and, perhaps most important, slightly healthier and happier than residents of comparable communities.

Looking Inside the Atlanta Findings. Several notable differences emerge *within* the Atlanta sample, that is, between different types of residents. Most notably, social trust proves to be principally a function of race, with African-Americans much less trusting than are whites. Yet, this does not appear to be principally a function of race since black-white differences on inter-racial trust are much smaller than on general social trust. Race also figures strongly in faith-based engagement, with African-Americans more involved with their places of worship.

Implications. These and earlier findings suggest a need to consider how to build more social capital in Atlanta. That effort should be planned with an eye on the area’s current strengths and weaknesses, including its diversity and high faith-based engagement

Sparked by the work of Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam, many observers have been debating the state of social capital—that is, social resources for building healthy societies—across the U.S. In his much-acclaimed book, **Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community**, Putnam presents extensive data that points to a serious erosion of social capital in the U.S. over the last third of the twentieth century. One piece of evidence for this decline is the fact that, although more people are bowling, bowling leagues have declined

precipitously. In short, people are “bowling alone” instead of with friends, family, and co-workers.

To assess the stock of social capital in the U.S. in more detail, Putnam and colleagues at Harvard University launched a national survey—the first of its kind—on a broad range of aspects of social capital. With the support of community foundations from across the country, the project included separate surveys of forty communities around the country, including the Atlanta area. The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta sponsored the Atlanta-area survey, and Research Atlanta analyzed the data.

This report summarizes the principal findings of the Atlanta survey. The report is presented in five parts:

- A definition of social capital and explanation of why it may be important.
 - A description of the survey instrument and sample.
 - An examination of the levels of social capital in Atlanta as compared to similar communities.
 - An analysis of how levels of social capital vary among different groupings within the Atlanta sample.
 - A summary of the principal findings and their possible implications.
- Additional detailed information on the research is presented in several appendices.

What Is Social Capital and Why Does It Matter?

Experts have long recognized the importance to the economy and society of various kinds of capital, including (1) financial capital, especially money that can be invested, (2) physical capital, such as plants and equipment, and (3) human capital, comprised of people and the labor market skills they possess or develop. The idea of social capital recognizes that particular social characteristics may constitute “social capital” that is also crucial for healthy economies and societies.

Social capital refers specifically to “community connectedness,” which has two principal components:

- **Social networks:** The extent to which people are involved with other people in social networks at home, at work, at play, and in public affairs.
- **Feelings about reciprocity and trust:** The norms of reciprocity and trust that can grow from involvement in social networks.

A growing body of research makes a strong case that this social capital can promote many other important societal goods. Communities with higher levels of social capital—that is, more involvement in social networks and greater trust of each other—are likely to have higher educational achievement, better performing governmental institutions, faster economic growth, and less crime and violence. As well, people living in communities with higher levels of social capital appear to be happier and healthier and have longer life expectancies.

The idea of social capital also calls attention to a neglected component—in the American context anyway—in the classic French conceptualization of “liberty, equality, and fraternity.” Public policy debates have long focused principally on issues of liberty and equality and the competition between the two: How much liberty should people have? How much should that liberty be compromised to increase equality? “Fraternity,” the relationships between people, is left unaddressed. Yet, as the research on social capital’s beneficial effects documents, fraternity—or social capital—may be crucial for building strong and healthy societies.

The Social Capital Benchmark Survey

To assess the stock of social capital in the U.S., the Saguaro Seminar at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, under the leadership of Robert Putnam, undertook a major national survey during the year 2000. The survey included two types of samples: (1) a national sample and (2) separate samples of varying sizes from each of forty communities across the U.S. Community foundations supported the latter samples in the belief that the levels of social capital in their communities are of critical importance to overall community health.

This is the first major survey focused wholly on social capital. The intent is to develop baseline data on the state of social capital nationally and in various communities at the beginning of the new millennium, with those baseline data serving as a benchmark for assessing how the stock of social capital may change in the future. Survey results may also help the participating communities to identify their own strengths and weaknesses relative to social capital.

The survey instrument was developed by the Saguaro Seminar with the assistance of an expert Scientific Advisory Group. The national and local surveys were administered by phone by a private survey firm.

The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta funded the Atlanta component of the survey, and Research Atlanta analyzed the data. The Atlanta sample was drawn from five representative counties—DeKalb, Fulton, Cobb, Rockdale, and Henry—with the goal of obtaining a sample representative of the Atlanta metropolitan area as a whole. The sample was drawn randomly, resulting in a sample of 510 respondents. (Additional explanation of the survey methodology can be found in Appendix I of this report.) As Figure 1 shows, the racial makeup of the sample corresponds roughly to the racial makeup of the Atlanta-area population as a whole.

Levels of Social Capital in the Atlanta Area

Assessing the meaning of a particular amount of social capital is all but impossible without a standard of comparison. One good standard is a measure of the level of social capital in Atlanta at some earlier time, but, of course, that is not feasible since this is the first comprehensive survey of social capital. The next best standard of comparison is other similar communities. Those comparisons can speak to the question, how does the Atlanta area look as compared to communities with similar characteristics? To facilitate these comparisons, the Saguaro Seminar prepared data for what it terms “communities like mine” (CLM). The CLM data do not reflect specific communities because, in fact, there are no communities in the national sample sufficiently similar to Atlanta that valid comparisons could be made. The CLM data reflect instead what would be expected, judging from the national survey data, for a population with demographic characteristics—including race, education, age distribution, and “urbanicity” (a measure of the urban-suburban-rural split of the sample)—similar to those of the Atlanta sample.

The complete CLM comparisons are presented in Appendix III at the end of this paper. To provide an additional standard of comparison, that table also includes percentages for the full national sample. The most important comparisons pertain to various dimensions of social capital, as identified by the Saguaro Seminar and as defined in detail in Appendix II.

The findings suggest, to begin with, that the Atlanta area respondents do not differ greatly from residents of other areas in the U.S. Of the many differences highlighted below, none constitutes a dramatic contrast between residents of Atlanta and residents of similar communities or even residents of the nation as a whole. Differences as large as 10 percentage points—itsself a small difference on a 100 percentage-point scale—are rare, and most of the notable differences are in the 5-7 percentage-point range. As well, on many dimensions no differences between the Atlanta respondents and respondents from similar communities exceed 2-4 percentage points, a relatively small difference. We focus below principally on the dimensions where there are notable differences between Atlanta and the CLM.

Trust and Distrust in Atlanta

With that qualification, the survey data do indicate that levels of several kinds of social capital are somewhat lower in the Atlanta area than in similar communities. Perhaps most notably, Atlanta is lower on social trust, a composite measure of trust of each of a number of different

groups, including neighbors, friends, and store employees. Fully 47% of the Atlanta sample ranked as low on the social trust index as compared to 37% for similar communities. The most pronounced differences are evident on questions about people respondents knew *less* well. For example:

- 37% of the Atlanta sample perceived “most people” as “trustworthy,” as compared to 46% in similar communities.
- 16% of the Atlanta sample said they trust store employees “a lot,” as compared to 25% in similar communities.
- 42% of the Atlanta sample reported trusting police “a lot,” as compared to 47% in similar communities.

As the questions moved closer to home, the differences between Atlanta-area respondents and those from similar communities decreased. Thus, the Atlanta respondents were only 2-4 percentage points less trusting of neighbors, co-workers, and fellow church attendees than were residents of similar communities.

Lack of trust among the Atlanta sample is also evident on questions about trust of government (questions not included in the social trust index). Distrust of local government appears especially high, with only 32% of the Atlanta sample saying they trust local government “always or most of the time” in contrast to 42% in similar communities. By comparison, Atlanta-area respondents were only slightly less likely to offer the same assessment of national government—25% saying they trust the national government “always or most of the time” as opposed to 30% in similar communities.

Interestingly, distrust in the Atlanta sample is less evident in the area of inter-racial trust, a composite measure based on questions about trust of three other racial groups—Hispanics, Asians, non-Hispanic blacks, and non-Hispanic whites (with the composite measure excluding answers to the question about the respondent’s own group). Where 24% of the Atlanta sample rated high on this index, only a slightly higher 27% rated high in both similar communities and nationally.

Finally, the Atlanta sample appears similar to the national sample on questions of racial tolerance. Asked about a close relative marrying someone of a different race:

- 18% of the whites in the Atlanta sample said they would “somewhat” or “strongly oppose” a close relative marrying a black person, as compared to 22% of the national sample.
- 13% of the African-Americans in the Atlanta sample said they would “somewhat” or “strongly oppose” a close relative marrying a white person, as compared to 10% of the national sample.

A Deficit in Civic and Political Involvement?

Atlanta also appears to be low on social capital in the area of civic and political involvement. Here the survey used three indexes: (1) an index of involvement in “conventional politics” (e.g., voting, being registered to vote), (2) a separate index of involvement in “protest politics” (e.g., signing petitions, attending political rallies), and (3) a summary index of “civic participation,” including some political involvements plus involvement in community projects. On all three

indexes, the Atlanta-area sample shows less involvement than is true of residents of similar communities:

- 22% of the Atlanta sample ranked as high on involvement in conventional politics, as compared to 31% in similar communities.
- 22% of the Atlanta sample was also ranked as high on involvement in protest politics, as compared to 28% in similar communities.
- 19% of the Atlanta sample ranked high on civic participation as compared to 25% in similar communities.

In the area of conventional politics, although Atlanta-area respondents were at least as likely as residents of similar communities to report being registered to vote and having voted in the 1996 presidential election, they were less involved than their peers on some other dimensions:

- Fully 68% of Atlanta respondents were unable to name either of their U.S. Senators, as compared to 58% in similar communities.
- Atlanta respondents reported having read a daily newspaper on average only 2.8 days of the past week, as compared to 3.4 days for residents of similar communities.

As for the area of protest politics:

- 31% of the Atlanta sample reported having signed a petition in the last twelve months, as compared to 36% in similar communities.
- 14% of the Atlanta sample reported attending a political rally or meeting in the last twelve months, as compared to 18% in similar communities.

At the same time, there were some positive aspects to the community involvement of Atlanta-area residents. First, the Atlanta respondents were more likely to be involved in two kinds of community groups:

- 34% of the Atlanta sample reported being involved with a neighborhood association in the past year, as compared to only 24% in similar communities.
- 32% of the Atlanta sample reported being involved with a parents association in the past twelve months, as compared to 26% of residents of similar communities.

Second, the Atlanta respondents also showed evidence of more involvement in community projects and more faith in the community's ability to respond to crises. Specifically:

- 43% of the Atlanta sample reported having worked on a community project in the past twelve months, as compared to 38% of residents of similar communities.
- 56% of the Atlanta sample thought that their community would be "very likely" to conserve energy in time of an emergency, as compared to only 45% in similar communities.

A Religiously-Involved Community

Atlanta rated above the norm on several dimensions of social capital. First, the Atlanta respondents were ranked as higher than average on faith-based engagement, a composite measure of a variety of religious involvements. Here 40% of the Atlanta sample ranked high as compared to only 34% in similar communities. On some specific aspects of faith-based engagement:

- 41% of the Atlanta sample reported attending religious services at least weekly, as compared to 35% in similar communities.
- 47% reported being involved in church activities other than religious services as compared to 42% in similar communities.
- 81% reported their place of worship provides a sense of community, as compared to 74% in similar communities.

In the related area of giving and volunteering, the Atlanta respondents rated only marginally above residents of similar communities, but they do appear to be more likely to make large financial contributions to charitable causes, both religious and non-religious:

- 43% of the Atlanta sample reported giving more than \$500 to religious organizations as compared to 36% in similar communities.
- 26% of the Atlanta sample reported giving more than \$500 to non-religious causes as compared to 19% in similar communities.

A Diversity of Friendships

Atlanta-area respondents also rank slightly higher than residents of similar communities on the diversity of friendships index. This is a composite measure counting the different types of friends the respondent reported from a list of eleven possibilities (e.g., manual worker, welfare recipient, vacation homeowner). Overall, 26% of the Atlanta sample ranked high on the diversity of friendships index, as compared to 23% in similar communities. On some specific aspects of this diversity, however, Atlantans report much more diverse friendships:

- 79% of white Atlantans reported having at least one African-American friend, as compared to 56% nationally. (Asked the comparable question, 72% of African-Americans reported having at least one non-Hispanic white friend, essentially the same proportion as in the national sample.)
- 44% reported being friends with a homosexual, as compared to 39% in similar communities.

A Computer-Friendly Community

The survey asked two questions about computer-based social capital. On the first, asked whether they had been involved in online groups during the past year, only 4% of the Atlanta sample and 3% in similar communities answered yes, not a notable difference. However, in response to a second question asking how many times they had been involved in an on-line discussion over the Internet during the past year, Atlanta-area respondents reported 5.1 times on average as compared to 3.7 times for residents of similar communities.

On the issue of computer usage more generally, the Atlanta sample also appears more linked to computers than are residents of similar communities. Specifically:

- 66% reported having Internet access at home, as compared to 59% in similar communities.
- Only 40% reported zero Internet use at home each week, as compared to 47% for residents of similar communities.

If computers can become a basis for building new kinds of social capital, Atlanta has the potential to be a leader in that effort.

Healthier and Happier?

One of the reasons for being concerned about social capital is its potential impact on personal health and happiness. Prior research has shown that people who have more social capital are generally healthier and happier. That being the case, how are the Atlanta-area respondents likely to feel about their own health and happiness given their mixed stock of social capital?

The data indicate that they feel fairly good about their situation:

- 28% report being in excellent health, as compared to 24% in similar communities.
- 42% report being very happy, in contrast to 38% in similar communities.

Thus, although Atlanta-area respondents may be low on social trust and on civic and political participation, other factors—including their strong faith-based engagement and greater diversity of friendships—have helped them to feel happier and healthier than residents of similar communities.

Looking Inside the Atlanta Community

These comparisons of the Atlanta sample as a whole to similar communities may well be less interesting than comparisons *within* the Atlanta sample. For one reason, to the extent that prior research can be a guide, the differences between population groupings within Atlanta are likely to be greater than the differences between Atlanta and other cities. So, for example, the differences between high- and low-income respondents in the Atlanta sample are likely to be much larger than differences between Atlanta residents in general and the residents of *any* other city.

In addition, as the more important reason, comparisons within the Atlanta sample can help to pinpoint where—and perhaps why—social capital may be lacking in the Atlanta area, providing a starting point for discussing what action to take. If we know who lacks social capital, we can begin to consider how to address that shortage. (One comparison that is *not* possible, due to the nature of the sample, is between the different counties in the sample.) It is important to note, however, that the differences discussed below do not imply causation—these are only relationships, not necessarily causal relationships.

The Difficult Problem of Race and Trust

Social trust in Atlanta, the data suggest, is most strongly associated with race. As Figure 2 shows, African-Americans in the Atlanta area report much lower levels of social trust than do whites, with fully 69% of African-Americans reporting “low” social trust as compared to 33% of whites. (Due to a small sample size, data on an “other” group of Hispanics and Asians are not presented.) Social trust is also linked with age, with older respondents reporting more trust (a pattern consistent with findings Putnam reported nationally in **Bowling Alone**), as well as with some other personal characteristics, but the relationship with race is by far the strongest.

This pattern is by no means unique to Atlanta. A similar pattern can be seen in the national sample where 63% of blacks report low social trust as compared to 24% of whites. Both across

the country as a whole and in Atlanta, social trust among African-Americans appears to be very low. And, to recall, social trust refers to trust of a broad range of people—from people in general to store employees to neighbors, among others.

This social distrust among African-Americans does not appear to be principally a function of inter-racial distrust. To recall, inter-racial trust is a composite measure of trust of three groups—from a choice of Hispanics, Asians, non-Hispanic African-Americans, and non-Hispanic whites—other than one's own group. To be sure, social trust and inter-racial trust are correlated, and the latter may well influence the former. However, as shown in Figure 3, black-white differences on inter-racial trust are substantially less pronounced than on social trust. Differences between blacks and whites on inter-racial trust are only in the range of 12-15 percentage points, less than half the differences seen on social trust, making unlikely that interracial distrust is at the core of social distrust.

Reinforcing that conclusion, blacks and whites in the Atlanta sample report almost identical levels of trust for their group as for the other group. That is:

- 14% of the African-Americans in the sample report trusting white people “a lot” and 14% also report trusting African-Americans or blacks a lot.
- 26% of the whites in the sample report trusting African-Americans a lot and 27% report trusting whites a lot.

In short, Atlanta-area residents, African-American residents in particular, may be characterized by low social trust, but that distrust does not appear to be rooted principally in how we feel about other racial groups. That is an encouraging finding for a metropolitan area that is becoming increasingly diverse.

As another encouraging finding, inter-racial trust appears to increase with length of time lived in the community. As Figure 4 shows, 36% of Atlanta respondents who have lived in their community for more than twenty years report high inter-racial trust, as compared to only 15% of those who have lived there for less than six years. Of note, this pattern is not reproduced across the national sample as a whole, suggesting something unique about living in the Atlanta area may promote inter-racial trust. Perhaps living in the city—or metropolitan area—“too busy to hate” nurtures inter-racial trust.

Analyzing Atlanta's Civic Participation

The findings on civic participation—and related measures of political involvement and group involvement—are not surprising. Civic participation itself is somewhat higher among blacks than among whites, with 25% of whites rated as high as compared to 12% of blacks, but it appears to be principally a function of education. In particular, as Figure 5 shows, those respondents with a high school education or less tend to have much lower civic involvement. As education increases, the proportions of the sample with higher levels of civic participation also increase. This is an unsurprising finding in that education has commonly been found to be a primary predictor of civic and political involvement: More education tends to increase both the capabilities and motivations for people to become involved in public affairs.

Civic participation in Atlanta is also influenced, though to a lesser extent, by residential mobility. Residents who have been here longer and who expect to stay longer are more involved in civic

and political affairs than are residents who have not been here long and/or who expect to move in the near future. For obvious reasons, those who are new or who do not plan to stay do not become as involved in their communities. Here Atlanta faces a difficult challenge: How to build more civic participation in the face of economic and population expansions that inevitably bring more residential mobility than in most other cities?

Civic participation is also closely related to social trust, as Figure 6 shows. Moving from the left to the right side of the page, as civic participation increases, so do the proportions of the sample with higher levels of social trust also increase. As one illustrative comparison, 72% of those who are high on social trust are also high on civic participation, as compared to only 41% of those who are low on social trust.

Which is cause and which is effect? That is, does more civic participation build social trust or does higher social trust nurture civic participation? The influence most likely flows both ways. To the extent, though, that social trust shapes civic participation, Atlanta's civic participation undoubtedly suffers. Finding ways to build social trust in Atlanta might well help also to build greater civic participation.

The Central Place of Faith-based Engagement in Atlanta

Faith-based engagement occupies a central place in the story of Atlanta's social capital, but it also follows some patterns different from those followed by most other forms of social capital. For one thing, faith-based engagement is more prevalent among African-Americans than among whites, both in Atlanta and nationally. As Figure 7 shows, 47% of African-Americans in the Atlanta sample rank high on faith-based engagement as compared to 38% of whites. For another, unlike most kinds of social capital, faith-based engagement is essentially unrelated to income, although it is related to education. Thus, 48% of the Atlanta respondents who have at least a four-year college degree report high faith-based engagement, as compared to only 31% of those with a high school degree or less. Finally, as might be expected, faith-based engagement also increases with time lived in the community. In particular, of those respondents who had lived in their community for less than six years, 43% reported low faith-based engagement as compared to only 20% of those who had lived there longer.

Perhaps the most intriguing questions about faith-based engagement, given its greater prevalence in the Atlanta area, pertain to its role and potential role in shaping other kinds of social capital. Prior research suggests that this engagement may not provide a good foundation for building most other forms of social capital. Although religious involvements can promote giving and volunteering, they have also been found to be associated with less tolerance and less civic participation.

The data suggest a divided verdict on the role of faith-based engagement here. On the one hand, civic participation actually increases with faith-based engagement. As shown in Figure 8, 51% of those who are high on civic participation are high on faith-based engagement, as compared to only 30% of those who are low on civic participation. Faith-based engagement thus may encourage broader community involvement.

The linkage between faith-based engagement and social trust, on the other hand, may be a cause for concern. Among whites, social trust increases only slightly as faith-based engagement

increases, and, among African-Americans, there is no relationship—social trust neither increases nor decreases with more religious involvement. It is important to say, however, that these patterns do not necessarily point to a problem with religious institutions. Prior research has documented how lack of social trust can motivate some people to become more involved with their religions. For these people, religion may provide a refuge, and is as such a response to distrust rather than a cause. That said, it is true that faith-based engagement in Atlanta does not appear to be helping to build social trust.

Diversity of Friendships

No single factor stands out when examining which Atlanta respondents have a greater diversity of friends. Education appears to exert the strongest influence on this diversity, with, as evident in Figure 9, the more educated reporting more types of friends, a finding consistent with other studies. But other factors also appear to be important. For example, respondents in the 35-49 age bracket have a greater diversity of friends than those who are younger and, even more so, than those who are older.

Perhaps the most notable finding on diversity of friendships concerns its strong linkage to civic participation, as shown in Figure 10. Civic participation presumably leads to meeting more types of people, building the diversity of one's friendships. There is also a positive relationship between diversity of friends and social trust, but it is not as strong.

Conclusions and Implications

This first comprehensive survey of social capital reveals Atlanta to have a mixed stock of social capital. The Atlanta-area sample is lower than comparable communities on several important dimensions of social capital, especially:

- Social trust—10 percentage points lower in Atlanta than in comparable communities.
- Inter-racial trust—slightly lower in Atlanta than in comparable communities.
- Civic and political involvement—6-10 percentage points lower in Atlanta on various aspects of this involvement than in comparable communities.

Atlanta is higher on some other dimensions of social capital. Specifically:

- Faith-based engagement—5-7 percentage points higher than comparable communities.
- Diversity of friendships—slightly higher overall, but much higher on whites who report having African-American friends.

Finally, despite the deficits in trust and civic participation, the Atlanta-area respondents also reported being slightly healthier and happier than are residents of comparable communities.

The Meaning of the Atlanta Findings

More detailed analyses of the Atlanta data suggest some insights into the meaning of these general patterns. To begin with, the problem of social trust in the Atlanta area, as nationally, is most acute among African-Americans, who report much lower levels of social trust than do whites. As Robert Putnam has argued, although greater population diversity brings a special richness and many benefits to communities, it complicates the building of social capital. Other

things being equal, most research indicates that, the more diverse a community, the less social capital it is likely to have.

However, some encouragement on this issue can be found in two other findings about trust. First, inter-racial distrust is not nearly as great in Atlanta as is social distrust. Thus, it does not appear that social distrust in Atlanta is rooted primarily in race relations, perhaps making the problem less intractable. Second, inter-racial trust also increases with length of residence in Atlanta. Time here does appear to improve how one views people of other racial groups, perhaps in part because more time here leads to a greater diversity of friendships—another characteristic of the Atlanta-area sample.

Civic and political involvement in Atlanta appears to have its roots principally in education, consistent with prior research nationally. This involvement probably is lower in Atlanta at least in part due to the greater mobility of the area's population. Certainly, the more mobile of the area's residents are less involved in their communities, and the Atlanta-area population is more mobile than the populations of most other cities. Lower civic involvement could also be partially a function of the area's social trust since social trust and civic participation are closely related.

Faith-based engagement, one of the Atlanta area's strengths in the realm of social capital, is also the only kind of social capital more common among African-Americans. The central role of the church in the African-American community is readily evident in the higher religious involvement of that community's members.

As an Atlanta strong point, faith-based engagement might appear an obvious building block for creating other kinds of social capital. However, as Putnam has observed, although Americans who are more religious give more and volunteer more, they are also likely to be less tolerant and less politically involved. The Atlanta findings are actually more encouraging on this point in that faith-based engagement is positively related to civic participation and essentially unrelated to social trust. Still, even these findings raise questions about if and how religious institutions might be enlisted in any efforts to build other forms of social capital in the Atlanta area.

Another part of the challenge for building social capital in Atlanta stems from the greater mobility of the area's residents. Across most dimensions, social capital declines with both shorter lengths of time lived in the area and expectations of moving in the near future. This greater mobility, which is in part a consequence of the area's phenomenal growth, represents a major challenge for building social capital at least as long as that growth continues.

Overall, the picture of Atlanta's social capital that emerges from this study is mixed. There are clear trouble spots, especially low social trust and low civic and political participation. But there are also bright spots, as in our embrace of diversity, as reflected especially in our friendships, and in our strong faith-based engagement.

In looking to the future, it appears clear that Atlanta's social capital deficit could benefit from renewed attention. Although the Atlanta area has only a small deficit of social capital in the year 2000 as compared to other communities, that deficit comes at a time when, judging from Robert Putnam's extensive analyses in **Bowling Alone**, the country as a whole is at an historic low point in its stock of social capital. In short, most communities may be low on social capital now, and

Atlanta appears to be lower than the norm. The challenge for Atlanta may be to figure out how to build from its impressive strengths to address a likely declining base of social capital.